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AUTHOR Younkin, Sharon L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Most of the recent reseach on sex roles has focused on women. Research concerning the expression of nontraditional behaviors by men has been very limited. A study was conducted to examine sex differences in reactions to nontraditional male disclosure. Specifically, this study attempted to explore subjects' reactions to males who expressed either secure or insecure feelings in a job or relationship setting. Male (N=40) and female (N=79) university students were randomly assigned to a 2 (emotion disclosed: secure, insecure) x 2 (gender) x 2 (relationship, job) between groups factorial design. Subjects viewed a videotape of a male who they were to imagine was a close friend of theirs. The actor discussed either secure or insecure feelings about a job or a relationship. After viewing videotapes, subjects completed a questionnaire and the Semantic Differential. The results suggest that males are evaluated more negatively in expressing insecure feelings compared to secure feelings, by both males and females, even when competence is controlled. Males reported having difficulty expressing insecure feelings to a female about a traditional male area, a job, while females indicated difficulty in expressing insecure feelings about a traditional female area, a relationship. (NB)

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Reactions to Males' Emotional Expression in Job and Relationship Situations

Sharon L. Younkin, David J. Lutz, Kathleen Kelley

Department of Psychology
California State University, San Bernardino

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Although the examination of sex roles has come under intense scrutiny in the last 20 years, most of this research has focused on the various roles of women play in our society. In contrast, research concerning the expression of non-traditional behaviors by males has been very limited.

Studies suggest that sex differences in disclosure follow stereotypic role prescriptions (Glitter & Black, 1976; Lombardo & Berzonsky, 1979; Hollandsworth & Wall, 1981). Females, socialized in nurturing and expressive roles, tend to disclose information about themselves and their feelings (Bell, 1981). Males, on the other hand, are socialized to pay attention to external stimuli and to guard against revealing feelings and insecurities. Thus, men are comfortable disclosing "superficial" information and asserting themselves in areas somewhat removed from internal states. Furthermore, the literature suggests that males have a preference for females as the targets of their disclosures (Komarovsky, 1974; Olstad, 1975).

In addition to the finding that self-disclosing behavior follows sex role prescriptions, evidence appears to exist for three specific findings regarding disclosure: 1) males disclose less than females; 2) males disclose information that is less personal and less intimate than females; 3) males disclose strengths rather than weaknesses. It is suggested, however, that both sexes may be changing by way of integrating both masculine and feminine characteristics. The result of this process is that men may be engaging in "nontraditional" disclosures. For the purpose of our research, "nontraditional" male disclosure is defined as disclosure which is inconsistent with one or more of the three findings reported above.

Empirical research on sex differences in reactions to nontraditional male disclosure is sparse; however, existing literature suggests that men and women are equally critical of such disclosure. The purpose of the present study was to examine subjects' reactions to disclosure content which is specific to one area of male sex role prescriptions, namely, disclosure of feelings of insecurity. This particular approach may allow sex differences in the subjects' evaluations to surface. Additionally, this study will explore the possibility of differences in the setting in which emotions are disclosed. Specifically, the present study attempted to explore subjects' reactions to males who expresed either secure or insecure feelings in a job (a traditionally male arena) or relationship setting (a traditionally female arena).

Method

Seventy-nine female and 40 male university students were randomly assigned to a 2 (emotion disclosed: secure, insecure) X 2 (gender: male, female) X 2 (task: relationship, job) between groups factorial design. Subjects were asked to participate in a study investigating how individuals perceive others. Upon consent, subjects were informed that they would view a videotape of a male who they were told to imagine as a close friend of theirs. They were also told that following the tape they would be asked to complete a set of instruments designed to measure their perceptions of the male stimulus person. The subjects viewed one videotape of an actor discussing either secure or insecure feelings about a job or a relationship; i.e., four different scripts were utilized (see Table 1). Two male actors were

utilized and were counterbalanced across conditions. Subjects viewed one of these videotapes and following the viewing, they completed a short questionnaire and the Semantic Differential (Osgood, 1971). Upon completion of the rating instruments, the subjects were given a written debriefing statement which explained the full purpose of the study, i.e. to measure whether there are sex differences in how people react to a male who engages in nontraditional disclosure. Additional time was allotted in order to answer any and all of the subjects' questions about the experiment.

Results

Three sets of analyses were applied to the data. First, a factor analysis with a varimax rotation was performed on the 30 items of the Semantic Differential to determine grouping of individual items. As expected, factor loadings of the items revealed three significant factors: 1) an evaluative factor, accounting for 19% of the variance; 2) a well-being factor, accounting for 17% of the variance; 3) a potency factor, accounting for 10% of the variance. Second, to determine the predictive value of the emotion, task and sex variables on the dependent variables hierarchical step-wise regression analyses were conducted. The dependent variables examined were the Semantic Differential factors and the response questionnaire.

A significant main effect was isolated for emotion on both the well-being factor, F (1,117) = 74.69, $p < .001$, and the potency factor, F (1,117) = 7.77, $p < .006$. These results indicated that the secure discloser (M's = 25.10 and 15.61 for well-being and potency factors, respectively) was rated more

positively (i.e. lower scores) than the insecure discloser (M's = 39.49 and 17.65 for well-being and potency, respectively) on these two scales. Therefore, the secure discloser was seen as more socially adjusted and stronger than the insecure discloser.

Taking as overall view of the emotion expressed, there was a preference for the individual who expressed security in both the job and relationship situations. Subjects' preference for the secure male is further supported by their choice of him over the insecure male in specific roles, i.e., coworker and boss. The secure individual (M = 2.53) was judged as a more desirable coworker than the insecure individual (M = 2.85), F (1,117) = 5.34, p < .05. Not surprisingly, the secure individual (M = 2.87) was also preferred as a boss over the insecure individual (M = 3.73), F (1,117) = 13.20, p < .001.

On questions intended to measure the likelihood of disclosure to both male and female friends, subjects responded differently based on the friend's gender. While there were no significant effects for the question regarding a male friend, an interesting pattern of results was evidenced on the question about disclosure to a female friend. A significant emotion (secure/insecure) X task (job/relationship) X sex of subject (male/female) interaction was observed, F (1,103) = 8.08, p < .01. When discussing feelings about an intimate relationship with a female friend, female subjects stated that they would be more likely to share secure feelings (M = 1.78) than insecure feelings (M = 3.28). When the topic under discussion involved work-related issues, these same female subjects stated that they would be equally as likely to express secure feelings

(M = 1.61) as they would insecure feelings (M = 1.85). A complimentary pattern of results was observed for the male subjects. While males were equally as likely to share secure feelings (M = 2.11) and insecure feelings (M = 2.27) about a personal relationship with a female friend, they were far more reticent to disclose insecure feelings (M = 3.36) than secure feelings (M = 1.63) about work-related issues.

Conclusions

These results suggest that males are evaluated more negatively in expressing insecure feelings compared to secure feelings, by both males and females, even when competence is controlled as it was in this study. Similarly, males have difficulty expressing insecure feelings to a woman about a traditional male area, a job, while females indicated difficulty in expressing insecure feelings about a traditional female area, a relationship.

TABLE 1

Insecure Job

It's not easy to talk about this, but you know, I've been having a hard time ever since I started the new job. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be doing there and that makes me feel insecure and uncomfortable. I mean, everybody else seems to know what they're doing, they all seem so confident and relaxed. And the more I look at them the worse I feel about myself. The boss tells me I'm doing a good job but it doesn't make me feel any better. Well, that's not true. For a minute I guess I feel better but then I think he's just saying it because he can tell I'm worried or because he's a nice guy, you know. Sometimes I think maybe I've bitten off more than I can chew and I don't know what to do about it. I wonder if I can handle it all and then I get scared. I guess I'm afraid of failing, you know.

Secure job

I've been doing pretty well lately, I guess it's because of the new job. I really feel comfortable with what I'm doing there. I mean, I actually like going to work now. Of course there are still some bad days with the stress and all but I find myself feeling relaxed and challenged. I guess I'm confident now that I can handle the responsibilities, you know. I find the work interesting. Sometimes I look around at the other guys and some of them look tense, burned-out. I feel sorry for them, you know, and I think how lucky I am. It's great to feel good because I do work hard and it helps to know that people notice it. I think I'm going to succeed and that feels great.

Insecure Relationship

It's not easy to talk about this but, you know, I've been having a hard time ever since I started dating her. I feel insecure when I'm around her and unattractive and nothing I do seems to change the way I feel. I'm not even sure why I feel this way, you know. Sometimes when we're out together I look at other guys on dates and they seem so damned relaxed, like they know what they're doing. And I think "What's she doing with me?" I mean I feel like I can't possibly be as fun or as interesting as they seem. And whenever we're kind of quiet I get really uncomfortable and can't think of anything to say. It's really bothering me. She tells me she loves me and for a minute I'm on top of the world. But it doesn't last. I just can't stop thinking that I'm not quite good enough for her, you know, and I'm afraid that sooner or later she's going to leave me.

Secure Relationship

I've been doing pretty well lately. I guess ever since I started dating her. I feel very comfortable with her, you know. She's so easy to talk with and I find myself relaxing everytime she's around. Sometimes we sit up talking and laughing for hours. She's just great. We're really compatible. It's so natural being myself when I'm around her. Sometimes when we're out together I'll see couples making small talk or whatever and the guy looks so uncomfortable. And then I look at her and think how well we get along. I feel sorry for those other guys you know. She tells me she loves me and I know she means it. And I just feel on top of the world, like this is it. I really think it is going to last.

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